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AUTHOR Kinasewitz, Theodore
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ABSTRACT

This practicum attempted to improve the triennial review process for high school students receiving special education services, make these reviews more meaningful, and use these reviews to enhance instructional programming. A survey of staff (N=18) involved in special education planning was followed by development of an inservice training program which focused on legal requirements of special education 3-year reevaluations and best practices endorsed by other school districts, states, and professional organizations. A collaborative approach between the school psychologist and the leading special education teacher was utilized in conducting the triennial review of 10 students. Alternative methods of assessment were identified including clinical interviews, vocational evaluation, and reports from outside professionals such as psychiatrists and occupational therapists. In 5 of the 10 cases, a psychological evaluation featuring intellectual testing also took place. Survey questions are appended. (Contains 26 references.) (DB)

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ED 379 830

Improving the Triennial Review Process for High School Special Education Students by Utilizing Alternative Assessment Methods

by

Theodore Kinasewitz

Cluster 53

A Practicum I Report Presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

1994

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

Verifier: Joyce Emmett
Joyce Emmett

Special Education Supervisor
Title

Danbury, CT
Address

12/9/94
Date

This practicum report was submitted by Theodore Kinasewitz under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

December 13, 1994
Date of Final Approval of Report

Mary Ellen Sapp
Mary Ellen Sapp, Ph.D.
Adviser

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ABSTRACT

Improving the Triennial Review Process for High School Special Education Students by Utilizing Alternative Assessment Methods. Kinasewitz, Theodore M., 1994: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Special Education/ Individualized Educational Programs/PL 94-142/ Educational Needs/Interdisciplinary Approach/ Participative Decision-making/Psychological Evaluation/ School Psychologists.

The general goals of this practicum were to improve the triennial review process for special education, to make these reviews more meaningful, and to enhance instructional programs for the students.

The writer developed a solution strategy which combined in-service on the legal requirements of special education three-year reevaluations, and examination of best practices endorsed by other school districts, states, and professional organizations. A multi-disciplinary, collaborative approach to triennial reevaluations was implemented. The school psychologist worked with the primary special education teacher in reviewing 10 students who were due for their triennial review, and then determining what data would address instructional and transitional planning needs. Alternative methods of assessment included clinical interviews, vocational evaluation, and reports from outside professionals such as psychiatrists and occupational therapists. In five out of 10 cases, a psychological evaluation, featuring intellectual testing, still took place.

Results indicated that most of the practicum goals were met. The high school staff involved in special education instruction and planning became knowledgeable about legal guidelines for triennial reevaluations. There was an examination of best practices in other districts and some of these components were adopted in the writer's high school. The triennial reviews were perceived as more relevant for instructional and transitional planning purposes. This new collaborative approach did not result in the school psychologist having more time for professional duties apart from testing.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

The writer's work setting is in a small New England city with a population of approximately 70,000. This city was primarily a manufacturing center for most of the 19th Century through the first half of the 20th Century. The nature of the city changed after World War II, and it has evolved into a heterogenous community with economic and ethnic diversity. Several Fortune 500 corporations relocated manufacturing plants and headquarters to this city, and a large number of smaller support companies have been established. To a large extent, this city has evolved into a bedroom community for corporate professionals who work both locally and in major corporate centers located as far as 90 minutes away. In short, the city's character can best be described as a combination of white-collar professional and blue-collar industrial workers.

The ethnic and racial make-up of the city has changed in the last 30 years. The city has always had a sizeable Hispanic, Middle Eastern, and Portuguese population, but

this time span has also seen a large influx of African-Americans, Southeast Asians and more Hispanics. According to 1990 census data, the most populous groups are whites (74%), Hispanics (16%), African-Americans (10%) and Asian (4%). The minority population of the high school is 36% (African-American, Hispanic, Asian). This diversity is reflected in the public school system, in which students come from homes in which more than 20 different languages are spoken.

The city epitomizes many characteristics of a small town, but there is also a big city influence because of its location about one hour and three hours respectively, from two of this nation's ten largest metropolitan areas. There is a state university situated in this city which provides many educational and cultural activities. There is significant corporate support for both the university and the public school system.

This city is served by many schools. The public school system has about 8400 students in 13 elementary, two middle and one high school (which includes a separate alternative high school). There are also six parochial (Catholic, Lutheran and Jewish) elementary schools, one Catholic high school, one state vocational-technical high school, and one private preparatory school.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The writer is a school psychologist in the city's lone public high school. The student population is approximately 2300 in grades 9-12 and the school is divided into two equal administrative units. The psychologist is assigned to one of these units. The writer's main duties include providing psychological assessment, interviewing in crisis situations, counseling with students and parents, serving as a liaison with state and community agencies, and consulting with staff.

The largest part of the job involves diagnostic assessment. This takes place in two ways. The first is through referrals to a multi-disciplinary, prereferral student assistance team which deals with students who are experiencing problems in school and who may need more intensive support services. Often the diagnostic work may occur through a family and/or individual interview with the student, observation of the student, or through a review of the student's records and consultation with other staff members. Sometimes a formal battery of tests may be requested from the psychologist to ascertain whether significant cognitive or emotional factors are interfering with the student's progress. These data are shared with the multi-disciplinary student assessment team mandated under PL 94-142, known in the writer's state as the Planning and Placement Team (PPT). The PPT determines a student's

eligibility and need for special education services.

The second main use of psychological testing is with the approximately 240 special education students in the writer's high school. No later than every third year, the PPT must review the progress and determine the continuing eligibility of a special education student. In practice this has meant that the psychologist retests the student with evaluative instruments that are the same or similar to those used when the student was first assessed for special education eligibility. Although this is not actually required by law, this procedure has become common practice in the majority of school districts.

The writer has worked as a school psychologist in public school districts for 21 years, the last 18 in his current school district. He has worked on various grade levels, from preschool through high school, but most of his professional experience has been on the high school level. The writer's experience has also included serving as a psychologist in two residential facilities, one for deaf-blind students and also at a treatment center for emotionally disturbed boys. The writer has also taught as an adjunct instructor in psychology at several colleges and universities, teaching courses in general psychology, child and adolescent development, and exceptional children. He is a member of national, state, and local teachers' associations and at various times has been a member of national and state organizations of school psychologists.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

According to requirements of the federal laws concerning special education services (PL 94-142 and PL 99-457), each student who has already been identified as educationally handicapped must have his/her progress reviewed by a multi-disciplinary team (the PPT) on at least an annual basis. This team is also charged with the responsibility of developing an updated individualized educational plan (IEP). Federal law also mandates that the student's continuing eligibility for special education services must be assessed by this team at least every three years. One of the requirements is that this reappraisal must be based on more than one source of evaluative data, and that at least one of the sources must be based on the student's educational functioning. In practice, in addition to some report on academic levels of functioning (which may or may not involve updated testing), the usual procedure for this 3-year reevaluation (triennial review) has been for a psychologist to administer a new battery of psychological

tests, with the main emphasis being an updated intellectual assessment.

There are a number of problems with this approach. In general, it appears that current procedures in the triennial review of special education students do not follow best practices. Little attention is given to delineating the evaluative data which is most appropriate for determining continuing eligibility for special education services and which would also help in improving the delivery of the educational program. Up to now, little thought has been given to examining alternatives to having the updated psychological evaluation serve as the main component of the triennial review. There is also misunderstanding on the part of the staff most involved in special education planning as to the actual legal requirements of a triennial reevaluation. Thus, triennial reviews do not necessarily incorporate the most efficient and useful data-gathering techniques which would best meet the needs of individual students.

Problem Documentation

Interviews with staff indicated a lack of knowledge of the requirements of PL 94-142 regarding the triennial review process. The general perception was that the triennial review process contributes little to the improvement of a handicapped student's educational program. A telephone

survey which was administered to 14 members of the Special Education and Pupil Services Departments (psychologists, special education teachers and administrators, counselors and social workers) is presented in Appendix A.

Thirteen out of 14 respondents stated that there was a perceived value to the concept of a triennial reevaluation. In practice, however, there is little new information obtained in the reevaluation process unless instructional staff members sought specific answers to questions about the student and the appropriateness of his/her special education program. During the last school year, out of 52 students who came before the PPT for a triennial review, only three had significant program changes (such as in classification or in placement from a resource room to a self-contained setting). In each of these cases, the staff member primarily responsible for the student had already voiced the need to look into these changes. In the nearly 18 years that this writer has worked in the present job setting, there have only been three times that significant new data has been obtained that led to a major change in special education classification solely from the psychological evaluation.

There is also a problem with the special education staff understanding what is mandated as part of a triennial reevaluation. Twelve out of 14 respondents incorrectly stated that the psychologist must retest a handicapped

student as part of a triennial reassessment.

There is support in the literature on assessment for the use of psychological testing as part of a multi-factored approach to help determine diagnostic classification (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1991; Sattler, 1988). The continued emphasis on psychological testing as the main part of a triennial review, however, undermines the need for instructionally-relevant assessment information and team decision-making (Reschly & Grimes, 1990). Yet, most common is the continued practice of readministering a battery of psychological tests in a 3-year review, especially through the use of individual intelligence tests (Oakman & Wilson, 1988).

The noncategorical organization of special education programs in the writer's high school would be a reason to discontinue the routine readministration of intelligence tests as the main part of a triennial review. Handicapped students are programmed according to their individual profiles and educational needs, rather than by diagnostic category, and thus the value of the psychological evaluation is lessened. Decisions about the type of special education program are based on what will be most appropriate for the student on an instructional basis, with the diagnostic label being only marginally considered. For example, in this high school, there are students with mental retardation who attend mainstream classes and only receive resource room support. In addition, the practice in this high school is

not to terminate a student from special education unless the evidence is most compelling. It has only been in rare instances, and with unanimous agreement, that a student has been found no longer eligible for special education during a triennial review on the high school level.

Another indication of dissatisfaction with the current practice of conducting triennial reviews may be inferred from the fact that 10 out of the 14 survey respondents indicated that they do not want the triennial review to be based mainly on the psychologist's report. Instead, they would also like to have information about the student from other professionals outside of the school system who have evaluated him/her, such as physicians, psychotherapists, social service workers, vocational evaluators and supervisors, and so forth.

Causative Analysis of the Problem

There are a number of contributing factors which cause the triennial review process to be ineffective in the writer's high school. First, there is the mistaken belief by most PPT members that psychological reevaluation, i.e., psychological testing, defines a triennial review. This holds true no matter what the student's handicapping condition may be, or what information might actually be most useful to the PPT in developing the student's IEP. In practice, the special education teacher primarily responsible for the student notifies the school psychologist

that the student is due for an updated assessment. Most often, when the teacher is questioned as to whether there is something special that the psychologist should look for, or if there is a significant possibility that there may be a major change in the student's program, the answer is negative and the teacher is most concerned about having the new testing completed before the PPT meeting. This request for an updated psychological takes place even when the student has been involved with other professionals who could provide important information about his/her functioning.

This practice of equating the psychological evaluation with a triennial reevaluation has had a long tradition. This practice was also in effect in another state that the writer worked in prior to accepting his current position, and was also followed in this school setting under the state special education regulations which were in effect before the implementation of PL 94-142. The writer contacted 10 of the surrounding school districts, and in only one district was latitude given as to the type of information that would normally be sought as part of a triennial review; in all of the others, an updated evaluation by the psychologist was expected. Thus, in practice, rather than have professional staff actively seek the type of information which might better help them serve the handicapped student, it is an almost automatic process that a new psychological evaluation is administered. This occurs even though by the time that

the student is in high school, there may already be three or four previous psychological evaluations on file.

Another contributing factor is the expectation from persons outside of the school system that a new psychological evaluation will take place every three years. Parents of handicapped students and outside agencies providing extra support and post-graduate assistance, such as rehabilitation agencies, sheltered workshops, and college learning disability programs, typically hold similar expectations.

In summary, tradition and emphasis on meeting perceived legal requirements reinforce the practice of having a new psychological evaluation every three years (even though this is not actually required by either federal or state statutes), rather than having the PPT actively seek alternative sources of evaluative data which would enable the staff to devise a more effective instructional program for the handicapped student.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

A review of the literature indicates that the value of a psychologist readministering a battery of tests similar to what was used in the initial assessment for special education eligibility provides little new information and has little impact upon instructional planning and change in educational placement.

Evidence has been presented that the test data in a

readministration has little effect upon decision-making (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Richey & Graden, 1982), even though testing is still a major part of most triennial reviews. The professional literature contains a number of studies which further analyze the stability of test results and the usefulness of the psychologist's report in placement decisions and development of the IEP.

The most frequently used test administered by the psychologist is one of the Wechsler Scales, and for most school-age children this means the Wechsler Intelligence Test for Children - Revised (WISC-R) or its successor, the WISC-III, which has become available in the past two years. Several studies indicate that Wechsler IQ scores remain relatively stable, particularly when it is administered to children age eight and older (Bauman, 1991; Juliano, Haddad & Carroll, 1988; Oakman & Wilson, 1988; Sattler, 1988; Stavrou, 1990; Vance, Hankins & Brown, 1987). This also holds true for learning disabled students (the category with the highest number of students). Regular testing with individual intelligence tests may provide little new information to help in educational planning and suggesting that readministration of these tests should not be required or encouraged (Martin, 1979; Oakman & Wilson, 1988).

Such a position was supported by a survey of school psychologists concerning their perceptions of the value of psychological reevaluations. Respondents indicated that

very few students' diagnosis or placement was changed as a result of the reassessment (Elliott, Piersel & Galvin, 1983). The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) reviewed the literature and published a position paper criticizing the routine use of psychological testing in special education reevaluations (1989).

There is also the question of the stability of special education placements and the role of testing in placement decisions. This writer was able to find only three studies which addressed this issue. In general, it appears that the classification that a student received in the initial assessment of eligibility for special education largely determined placement decisions throughout his/her school history (Clarizio & Halgren, 1991; Walker, Singer, Plafrey, Orza, Wenger & Butler, 1988; Wolman, Thurlow & Bruininks, 1989). The first and last studies found a moderate degree of change in special education placements, but the vast majority of these changes occurred among students classified as speech-and-language impaired.

There is also a problem with the use of cognitive measures as effective guides in instructional planning. Snider and Tarver (1989) found that WISC-R IQ scores are largely dependent upon academic achievement, and not the reverse as is commonly thought. Thus school personnel should focus on instructional efforts, not the student's diagnostic label. Efforts to match cognitive processing

style from the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (K-ABC) with classroom instructional activities did not have a meaningful impact upon student achievement (Ayres, Cooley & Severson, 1988; Good, Creek, Katz, Vollmer & Chowdhri, 1993).

In summary, the literature suggests that despite the strong emphasis on psychological testing in special education triennial reviews, its practical effectiveness is limited. These limitations apply to the determination that the student is still educationally handicapped, the actual classification of the handicap, and the usefulness of the testing data in planning an effective educational program.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The goals of this practicum were to improve the triennial review process for high school special education students, to make these reviews more meaningful, and to enhance instructional programs for the students.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes at the end of this implementation were as follows:

1. Members of the PPT will become knowledgeable in the legal requirements of special education triennial reevaluation.

2. Special education staff will report that the triennial review process is an integral part in the development of an appropriate individualized educational program for a handicapped student.

3. Alternative means of satisfying the requirements of a triennial review will be considered and utilized by the PPT.

4. The PPT (when appropriate) will utilize

information from outside specialists (physicians, vocational supervisors, psychotherapists, social service workers, etc.) in developing the individualized educational plan as part of the triennial review process.

5. School psychologists at the high school level will report that they spend more time in duties other than testing, such as counseling, crisis intervention, parent education and community outreach.

Measurement of Outcomes

The expected outcomes at the end of the implementation were measured in the following ways:

1. A survey (Appendix B) similar to the one (Appendix A) that was administered in the preliminary stages of the practicum outline was given to 18 staff members involved on a regular basis with special education assessment and program development (special education teachers and administrators, social workers, psychologists, and guidance and crisis intervention counselors). The staff was polled as to their knowledge of the requirements of special education triennial reviews.

2. The same survey was used to ascertain staff perceptions of the effectiveness of the triennial reviews in enhancing the delivery of special education services.

3. Ten students were selected who were due for a triennial review in the next several months. A record was kept which documented a collaborative effort between the

psychologist and other PPT members to consider and obtain alternate sources of data in place of, or in addition to, the traditional psychological testing. Alternative sources of evaluative data consisted of clinical interviews, examination of learning style, vocational work-ups and curriculum-based assessment.

4. The record documented (when appropriate) input from professionals outside of the school system who had worked with any of the 10 students, and who could provide significant information for the PPT to evaluate in the triennial review process.

5. The writer kept a time log and recorded the amount of time spent on various types of professional duties at the beginning and at the end of this practicum. This data indicated whether a new approach to triennial review enabled school psychologists to spend more time on responsibilities apart from testing.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

The 3-year review of special education students at the high school level did not reflect best practices. This process had become automatic and it did little to improve the student's instructional program. According to the original intent of PL 94-142, the focus of the triennial reevaluation was to ensure that the student still qualified for special education assistance. In reality, in the writer's high school, there was almost never any attempt to remove a student from special education no matter what the evaluation data might suggest. Most of the effort in the triennial review at this school centered around classification issues, and thus information which might have served to improve the instructional program was largely ignored.

The literature suggested several ways to improve the triennial review process. The key to an effective triennial review is an initial review of important diagnostic questions and the determination of additional assessment

needs (Hartshorne & Hoyt, 1985). The need for the new data will vary according to the age, handicap, available information, student's progress and the length of time in special education. NASP (1989) stated that the routine readministration of a battery of psychological tests should not be practiced, and this was reinforced in a longitudinal study of special education reviews by Oakman and Wilson (1988).

In this writer's view, the data obtained as part of a triennial review should have relevance beyond merely confirming the previous diagnostic classification. This would appear to indicate that alternate approaches should be utilized in the triennial review process. As a first step, multiple sources of information which deal with analysis of the instructional environment should be sought (Christenson & Ysseldyke, 1989). This would seem to minimize the emphasis on repeated assessments focused on diagnosis and calls for effective collaboration between the evaluative and instructional staff, placing a premium on the psychologist's skills in consultation, observation and curriculum.

One effective approach which may remedy the dissatisfaction with norm-referenced measures in making instructional interventions is curriculum-based assessment (Shapiro & Eckert, 1993; Shinn, Rosenfield & Knutson, 1989; Tucker, 1985). This process can be utilized both in making decisions as to the appropriateness of a student's

educational program, and also in establishing much of the direction and content of the instructional program. Some of its advantages are that it reduces test bias and that the information obtained through the curriculum-based assessment (CBA) approach is more educationally useful. Shapiro and Eckert noted in their study that although school psychologists state that they are knowledgeable about CBA, the actual use of this approach is much less.

Another useful approach in triennial reviews is the use of vocational evaluations (Levinson, 1987; Levinson & Capps, 1985). This may include an assessment of vocational interests and aptitudes, and may consist of evaluations by actual job-site supervisors, as well as through vocational test batteries. This approach may have added importance since school districts are now required to establish plans for a special education student's transition from high school.

As requested by PPT members in the preliminary survey on the effectiveness of triennial review procedures, the use of outside professionals to provide information for the triennial review could be easily implemented. This plan could include medical personnel, vocational evaluators and supervisors, mental health therapists and other professionals who have evaluated or treated the special education student.

Although it still appears that the practice of having a

new psychological evaluation is the most common approach for a triennial review, individual school districts and some states have employed different requirements. One school district in the writer's state requires the psychologist to review all of the diagnostic data in the student's file, and then to observe and to interview the student and consult with teachers and other staff members who work with the student. There is a place on the triennial review form for the psychologist to recommend further testing if there is a consensus that this information is needed. This method serves as a promising approach away from the automatic retesting, but it does little to address direct intervention in the instructional program. The State of Louisiana (1993) addresses the issue of reevaluation with a minimum of eight steps in the process. There is an emphasis on consultation and classroom observation, with further testing and evaluation procedures required only "as deemed necessary or appropriate" (p. 16).

Description of Selected Solution

The solution selected by the writer was based on the literature review and also from ideas generated from an analysis of the triennial review process which were pertinent and unique to the writer's work setting. It was expected that by implementing the provisions of this section that the 3-year review process of students who were already in special education would help to improve the delivery of

the educational program.

The approach that was taken in this intervention to improve the triennial review process employed a collaborative approach. Instead of automatically assuming that a psychologist would retest a student in the third year, care was be taken to make sure that the information gathered provided useful information to answer specific questions that the PPT members had about the child.

This meant that prior to the triennial review meeting, the school psychologist arranged to meet with the special education staff member primarily responsible for the student who was coming up for a three-year review within the next three months. The goal was be to obtain a clear idea of current levels of educational functioning and possible referral questions. These questions included references to instructional programming and post-graduate transitional planning.

This writer established and coordinated a multi-disciplinary team which examined current practices in triennial assessment at the writer's high school and developed alternatives consistent with best practices. This process delineated what was actually mandated by federal and state law to avoid any misinterpretations by persons involved in the triennial review process. The PPT was then empowered to consider alternatives to current practices which would result in evaluative procedures which

contributed to the improvement of the educational program. This collaborative process provided for shared input and was especially appropriate at the high school level because of its departmental nature and the fact that the student was involved with many different staff members who might offer significant perspectives on the student.

The writer presented an inservice program with staff involved in special education planning. The writer reviewed the survey presented in Appendix A which enabled him to focus on current perceptions of the triennial review process. This inservice training reviewed the actual requirements of a triennial review according to federal and state guidelines. Different strategies cited in the literature review were shared with the staff, and in addition, alternative approaches utilized by other school systems were presented.

After this inservice training, a select group of staff members worked with the writer to further examine this data and develop a set of guidelines for all PPT members to utilize in the triennial review process. Then, 10 students were selected and assessed through a collaborative approach to triennial reevaluation.

Report of Action Taken

The following steps were taken over a period of 12 weeks in order to implement the alternative approach to triennial reevaluations at the writer's high school.

The plan was discussed by the writer before the Special Education and Pupil Service Departments at separate monthly meetings. During these initial two weeks, the writer followed this up through individual meetings with three staff members (all special education teachers) who had volunteered to work with the writer in developing an alternative format for triennial reviews.

During the next three weeks, the writer met with the team of volunteers to examine federal and state guidelines, review additional professional literature on triennial reviews, and to investigate approaches to triennial reviews utilized in other school districts in the state. This included contacting individual districts to find out if other formats were used which differed either from the common practice of having the psychologist conduct updated testing, or from what was suggested by the writer. Finally, the group agreed to the triennial review format which was adopted for this practicum.

The next part of the practicum involved selecting 10 students, who had their triennial review scheduled within the next three months. They were classified as educationally handicapped according to federal and state guidelines under the following classifications: learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, physically handicapped, neurologically impaired and mental retardation. Three of the students had several disabilities and were diagnosed as

multi-handicapped.

During the next five weeks, the writer and other appropriate staff members generated and collected the appropriate data for the alternative triennial review process. This included the psychologist meeting with the primary special education teacher to review the individual student, consulting with other PPT staff familiar with the student, interviewing the student, and arranging to obtain the necessary evaluative data. In several cases, this meant arranging for outside evaluations or obtaining reports from professionals outside of the school system. The writer maintained a journal which documented the 10 cases and the evaluative data which was obtained in each case.

During the last week of the practicum, 18 members of the Pupil Services and Special Education Departments were surveyed as to their perceptions of the triennial review process with a questionnaire (Appendix B) similar to the one which was administered prior to the implementation of this practicum. This information was used in evaluating whether this alternative approach to triennial evaluation planning enhanced both the instructional program and transitional planning for these students. The school psychologist reported on the work-related activities he was engaged in and the percentage of time allocated to each.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The goals of this practicum were to improve the triennial review process for high school special education students, to make these reviews more meaningful, and to enhance the instructional programs for the students. The solution strategies included inservice training with school staff, investigation of alternative methods and best practices, and collaboration with school staff who were involved in special education planning.

The results of the projected outcomes were as follows:

1. Members of the PPT will become knowledgeable in the legal requirements of special education triennial reevaluation.

This outcome was met.

All 18 respondents were able to correctly identify the legal requirements of a triennial review.

2. Special education staff will report that the triennial review process is an integral part in the development of an appropriate individualized educational

program for a handicapped student.

This outcome was met.

Ten out of the 18 respondents gave a high rating (4 or 5 on a rating scale of 1 to 5) on the questionnaire (Appendix B). However, it should be noted that only six different teachers were employed in the collaborative approach of this practicum, which may have somewhat limited the scope of the perceived effectiveness of this alternative approach to triennial reevaluations.

3. Alternative means of satisfying the requirements of a triennial review will be considered and utilized by the PPT.

This outcome was met.

In each of the 10 cases, alternatives to the customary psychological testing were considered. A collaborative decision was made in five of the cases that a psychological evaluation was needed to help the PPT plan an appropriate educational program. It should be noted that in every case, a thorough review of the student's current functioning took place, with the psychologist and special education teacher then determining what information would be helpful in future instructional programming or for transitional planning.

4. The PPT (when appropriate) will utilize information from outside specialists (physicians, vocational supervisors, psychotherapists, social service workers, etc.) in developing the individualized educational plan as part of

the triennial review process.

This outcome was met.

Reports from professionals outside the school system were included in six out of 10 cases. In two cases, a psychological evaluation was administered by the school psychologist to provide information which complemented the rest of the evaluative data.

5. School psychologists at the high school level will report that they spend more time in duties other than testing, such as counseling, crisis intervention, parent education and community outreach.

This outcome was not attained.

There appears to be two reasons for this. In order to facilitate the collaborative effort, scheduling concerns dictated that only one of the two high school psychologists (the writer) would take part in this alternative approach to triennial reviews. This allowed for more efficient use of time and facilitated the necessary collaboration between the psychologist and primary special education teacher within a limited timeframe. In terms of the psychologist's time log, the amount of time spent on the coordination and implementation of this practicum led to considerable additional work, which precluded a change in the time spent on other, non-assessment duties.

Writer's Practicum Log

The writer maintained a log throughout the implementation process of this practicum. There were several notable entries.

The first was that a compliance officer from the State Department of Education spoke to the combined Pupil Services and Special Education Departments just before the start of this practicum. Her comments focused on the legal requirements of triennial assessment according to federal law and state guidelines. Her presentation included most of the points included by the writer in his rationale for changing the triennial reevaluation process at the high school. Two of the compliance officer's points were that the triennial reevaluation did not mandate psychological testing and that the review was to be multidisciplinary, with at least one source of assessment including educational functioning. This was an excellent springboard to the actual inservice presentations that the writer conducted in the first two weeks of the practicum. The compliance officer's discussion helped provide the framework and legal justification for other staff members to support changes in the school district's approach to 3-year reevaluations in special education.

The next feature was the openness of the staff to consider alternatives and the willingness of volunteers to work with the writer in examining options and developing a

process for conducting alternative approaches to triennial assessment.

The last notable entry was the decision made by the writer to take sole responsibility for coordinating the initial review of the student's functioning and needs with the primary special education teacher, instead of sharing cases with the other psychologist assigned to the high school. This facilitated the ease in setting up the preliminary review, gathering the appropriate assessment data, arranging for appropriate outside evaluation, and obtaining reports from specialists outside of the school system who had worked with the individual student.

Discussion

Results indicated that four of five projected outcomes were attained, and that there was overall improvement in the triennial review process. These triennial reviews became a collaborative process and more relevant for instructional programming and meeting the individual needs of the students.

The process employed in this practicum was in line with the best practices concerning conducting assessment through a multi-disciplinary approach (Christenson & Ysseldyke, 1989; Huebner & Hahn, 1990) and in obtaining assessment data pertinent to appropriate referral questions (Hartshorne & Hart, 1985). The results of this practicum indicated that

there was still a tendency to look for a new psychological assessment (five out of 10 cases). It is difficult to determine if old habits die hard, or if this was a result of providing data which could be used in transitional planning. It should be noted that most college learning disability programs require a recent administration of the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale - Revised (WAIS-R), and in two of the cases, this test was given for that purpose. One individual who was in a class for students with mental retardation was going to leave the high school at the end of the year, and an updated cognitive assessment was required by the state agency responsible for providing post-graduate services. In each instance, the decision to administer intellectual testing was made in order to facilitate the transition process from public education even though previous intellectual assessments were on file, and it did not appear that there were any referral questions that required this assessment. Thus, this was a good example of a conflict between best practices and pragmatic considerations in which the PPT did not want to stand in the way of a student receiving services to which he/she might be entitled.

One surprising development was the fact that curriculum-based assessment was not employed in any of the 10 triennial reviews. None of the questions that special education teachers sought answers to pertained to specific

curricular or classroom content issues. There are several possible explanations for this. These include the departmental nature and tracking of the high school by which on a very broad basis, students are already grouped according to ability and sequence of courses. In addition, at the secondary level there is much more emphasis on compensating for, and not remediating a student's weaknesses, and special care is taken to place a student in classes which are appropriate. Individual modifications are already in place for students in mainstream classes, which, in turn, tends to minimize specific issues which would be raised concerning classroom instruction. Lastly, this might also reflect Shapiro & Eckert's (1993) findings that school psychologists do not actually utilize CBA to any great extent.

The last feature to mention is that it appeared in discussion with the teaching staff, that the focus for the most part (at least on the high school level) was on transitional issues, i.e., what was going to happen to the student after graduation. This was almost equally important for freshmen, as well as seniors. Thus, vocational assessment (either through testing or job-site placement) was recommended for all but one of the students who had not previously had any type of vocational evaluation.

Recommendations

Based upon the results of this practicum and the discussion of these results, the writer offers the following recommendations:

1. There should be continued emphasis on joint planning and seeking assessment data which has specific instructional or transitional planning value.

2. This alternative approach to triennial reevaluation should be expanded throughout the high school.

3. The triennial review for each student should be structured so that it begins several months before the actual PPT meeting. The process should incorporate sufficient time for the collaborative meeting between the psychologist and special education teacher, and also allow enough time to obtain any outside evaluations and reports.

4. This triennial review process should be explored as a viable approach throughout the entire school system, or at least on the secondary level. This can be initiated through an inservice presentation in which other Pupil Services and Special Education staff members would be presented with a summary of a review of the research on this topic and the results of this practicum. In turn, this presentation could serve as a springboard for members of both departments to examine the viability of this alternative approach to triennial reviews. The writer would be available to serve as a resource if consensus is reached

by the staff to change the present system of special education reevaluations.

Dissemination

The writer plans to disseminate the results of this practicum in the following ways:

1. An in-service presentation was made to a group of Nova Southeastern University doctoral students in Child and Youth Studies.

2. The results of this practicum will be shared with the high school Special Education and Pupil Services staff.

3. These results will be shared with the Director of Pupil Services and the district supervisors of Special Education.

4. The writer plans to submit the results of this practicum for inclusion in the newsletter of the state school psychologist association.

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APPENDIX A

TELEPHONE SURVEY ON THE TRIENNIAL REVIEW PROCESS

The first two questions are to be answered on a rating scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high).

1. What is your overall opinion of the effectiveness of the triennial review process in the high school?
2. Please rate the value of the triennial review process in the following areas:
   a. As a diagnostic tool?
   b. In instructional programming?
   c. Providing useful information to help in post-high school planning?
3. What is required in a triennial evaluation?
4. How often (either an actual number of cases or a percentage) has a triennial reevaluation yielded unexpected information that has taken you completely by surprise or led to a significant change in a student's special education program?
5. What changes would you like to see in the triennial review process?

APPENDIX B

POST-IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY ON THE TRIENNIAL REVIEW PROCESS

The first two questions are to be answered on a rating scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high).

1. What is your overall opinion of the effectiveness of the triennial review process in the high school?
2. Please rate the value of the triennial review process in the following areas:
   a. As a diagnostic tool?
   b. In instructional programming?
   c. Providing useful information to help in post-high school planning?
3. What is required in a triennial evaluation?